



## 20 years of ESSL – monthly jubilee topic

As part of the celebrations of **20 years of ESSL**, we are publishing a series of monthly jubilee topics highlighting different aspects of our work and community. Each month, we also briefly revisit a historical high-impact event featured as the “topic of the month” in the ESSL calendar. This time, we focus on the **tornado in Azdamičy in 1951**.

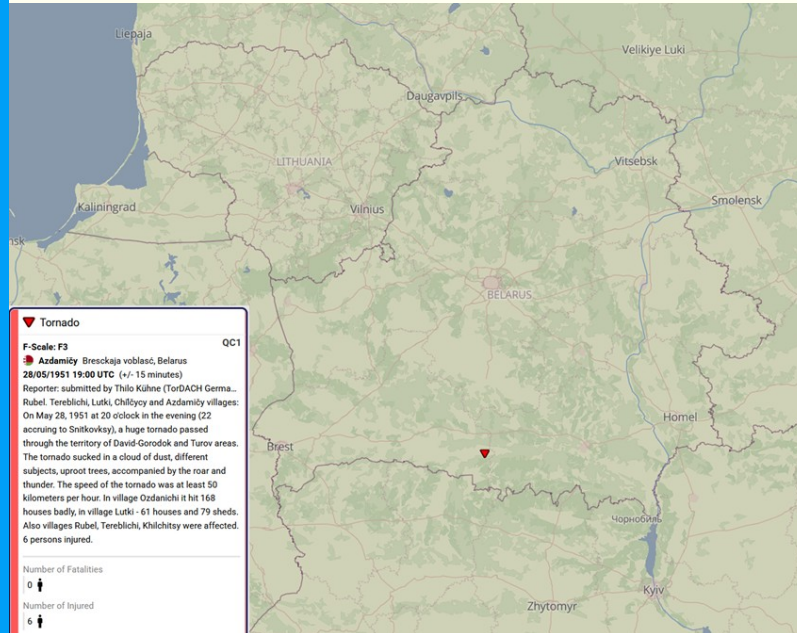
### **Azdamičy tornado (Bresckaja voblasć, Belarus) on 28 May 1951**

A violent tornado struck southern Belarus on the evening of **28 May 1951 (19:00 UTC)**. The tornado followed a **52-kilometre path** through the David-Gorodok and Turov areas and damaged several villages. **Six people were injured and no deaths were recorded**. Azdamičy was the most affected village, where 168 houses were badly damaged. In Lutki, 61 houses and 79 sheds were damaged. The villages of Rubel, Tereblichy and Khilchitsy were also affected. The path width of the tornado averaged 300 metres, reaching a maximum of 400 metres.

### **References**

Snitkovsky, A.I., 1987: *Tornadoes in the USSR [in Russian]. Russian Meteorology and Hydrology*, 9, 12–25 (Event No. 35).

Voznyachuk, L.N., 1954: *Materials for tornado evaluation in Belarus [in Russian]. Scientific Letters of Belarus State University, geography and geology series*, vol. 21, pp. 104–122.



Location of the F3 Azdamičy tornado in Belarus (red triangle; source: ESWD).

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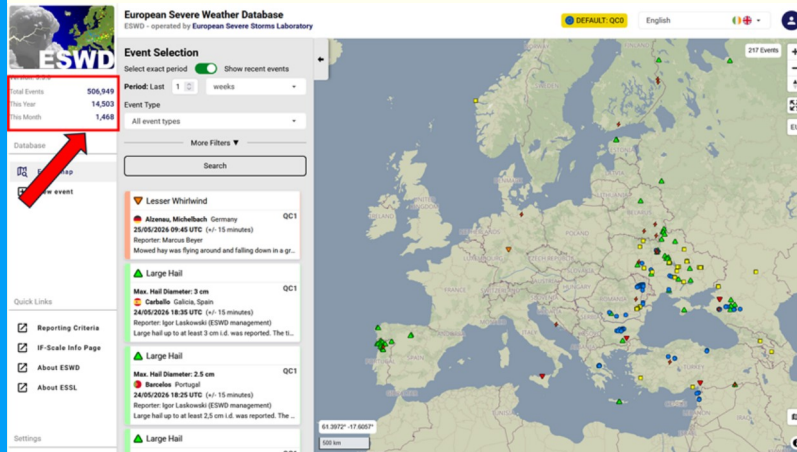
## ESWD passes half a million reports

As part of the **20th anniversary of ESSL**, we already wrote about the beginnings of the European Severe Weather Database (ESWD) in our [February Newsletter](#), and throughout 2026 we continue to share monthly stories connected to remarkable historical weather events featured in our calendar.

Now, the ESWD has reached another important milestone: **more than half a million reports** are currently stored in the database. Following the launch of the new ESWD user interface in **August last year**, the database continues to evolve, with ongoing improvements to both the platform itself and the reporting criteria, developed in cooperation with our partners. A small recent addition to the ESWD web interface now also

shows the number of reports submitted **in total, in the last year, and in the last month** directly in the sidebar, making it even easier to see how quickly the archive is growing over time.

A huge thank you to our **Voluntary Observer Persons (VOPs), Voluntary Observer Networks (VONs)**, and to everyone else contributing observations and verified information to the ESWD.



## The ESSL Research and Training Centre

For this month's jubilee topic, we reflect on how Wiener Neustadt became a place where forecasters from across Europe come to train and a physical home for the severe storms community.

*Article by ESSL Director of Operations Alois M. Holzer*

### Why Wiener Neustadt?

How Wiener Neustadt became a meeting place for meteorologists from across Europe and all over the world to further their training, and a physical home for the community of severe weather researchers.

Digital worlds are playing an increasingly important role in all our lives. This certainly applies to our professional interactions in the field of meteorology. So why even consider the importance of a physical location and an

optimised environment for meeting other people, for professional learning and for the exchange of knowledge?

Well, since its first year of full operation, that is, since 2012, the ESSL Research and Training Centre in Wiener Neustadt, Austria, has demonstrated that the qualities of such a dedicated physical location are virtually irreplaceable for the community of severe weather researchers in Europe. After several years, the place already feels a little like home to experts in convective storms.



ESSL Research and Training Centre in Wiener Neustadt in April 2012, just before opening for the first testbed season. Photo by Alois M. Holzer.

## 2010 – a sad year for ESSL and a new idea

The original idea arose from an informal meeting between members of the **ESSL Executive Board (EB)** and the US severe storm expert, **Dr Charles Doswell**, following the sudden death of ESSL's founding director, **Dr Nikolai Dotzek**, in 2010. The vision was, above all, to create a place where severe thunderstorm experts from all over the world could meet for testbeds and workshops.

In spring 2011, the EB met in Wiener Neustadt to inspect potential premises. Shortly afterwards, and with the **support of a small grant from the Wiener Neustadt city council**, it was decided to rent a 150-square-metre space near the city's main railway station, some 40 km south of Vienna. Why Wiener Neustadt? **A historic IF4 tornado, which**

**claimed 34 lives and left hundreds injured in 1916**, was certainly not the most important factor, but it did provide additional motivation. More decisive was the relatively good accessibility of the location, which is also easily accessible compared to large, isolated and often gated research sites. The town offers excellent rail links to Vienna and the Airport, which is not too far away, the availability of affordable hotels, and reasonable rent levels. At the time it was also an advantage that I myself was available to provide on-site support and handle logistics with regional partners.

### **Start into a new concept of storms forecasting in Europe**

During the winter months, we were able to equip our newly renovated premises with the necessary IT and seminar infrastructure, and **by June 2012 we were already able to carry out the first ESSL Testbeds**. The grand opening took place on **21 June 2012**, with national ambassadors, heads of meteorological services, WMO representatives and provincial governors in attendance as distinguished guests.

In the years that followed, the **ESSL Research and Training Centre** developed into a hub for knowledge exchange and development through expert workshops, exploring various aspects of severe convective storms and testing and demonstrating new tools and products to support forecasting. For this latter activity, the name '**ESSL Testbed**' served as a model for other similar events in Europe, whilst itself being loosely modelled on the US Hazardous Weather Testbed (HWT), albeit with a significantly stronger training component. Whilst it would have been impossible to organise an "expert testbed" in the early years due to the lack of expertise in Europe, the group of high-level experts has grown rapidly since the first ESSL Testbed was held, and in recent years the Testbed Expert Week has already become an integral part of the annual programme and now bears closer resemblance to the HWT.

## It matters how to train

Our **ESSL Research and Training Centre** has also become a venue for scientific project meetings, as our premises are optimised for both in-person and hybrid (online) interactions. In recent years, we have also invested in further training and coaching for ourselves. We strive to incorporate the latest findings from brain research, psychology and learning science. It has become clear that factors such as room design, participants' psychological well-being, the social environment, the pacing of content and the style of presentation, as well as physical factors such as refreshments during breaks, play a role in how well new concepts can be absorbed, accepted and retained in the memory. These scientific findings on how to teach and learn effectively have shaped the current concept and style of our courses, testbeds and other training events.

In 2019, shortly before Covid forced us to work exclusively online for a period, we were able to open our new and larger seminar room, which was required to host the EUMETSAT-ESSL testbeds. This expansion step doubled our rented room space to 300 square metres.



ESSL Research and Training Centre in Wiener Neustadt in May 2026 during the EUMETSAT Forecaster Testbed. Photo by Alois M. Holzer.

## A growing severe storms community

Hundreds of meteorologists and related scientists have visited us in Wiener Neustadt since 2012. Some have even become regulars, and a few of them have even joined our ESSL team. We are delighted with the very positive feedback we often receive and take the suggestions for improvement and ideas shared with us very seriously. After each event, we evaluate the feedback forms submitted. If you, as a reader, have not yet visited us at our premises, we would be delighted to welcome you.

Have you ever wondered why every pilot is required to undergo regular training, but not every weather warning specialist in Europe? Based on our experience witnessing very many forecasters over the years, we see a true need for this. In general, we expect a continued strong demand in the foreseeable future for highly specialised and well-trained experts to optimise the use of the ever-growing number of tools for forecasting, nowcasting and warning of severe convective storms. We also feel there is a continued need for a specialized and impartial service provider that delivers trustworthy feedback to developers and weather services.

## ESSL training calendar and Testbed 2026 and 2027

Date	Activity
1 – 2 June 2026	<b>NEW</b> 2-day ONLINE refresher on forecasting severe convection (qualification: at least one prior ESSL course or testbed <a href="#">week</a> )
15 – 19 June 2026	ESSL Testbed 2026 – regular week (focus on radar and NWP)
22 – 26 June 2026	ESSL Testbed 2026 – expert week (on invitation only)
7 – 11 September 2026	EMS Annual Meeting (co-sponsored by ESSL)
14 – 18 September 2026	ESSL-EUMETSAT Forecaster Testbed (MTG focus)
28 September 2026	20th Anniversary of the ESSL – jubilee event
29 September – 1 October 2026	IF Scale and wind damage assessment workshop
5 – 9 October 2026	ESSL-EUMETSAT Forecaster Testbed (MTG focus)
15 – 19 February 2027	<b>HIGHLIGHT</b> - 2nd edition of <b>new radar course</b> : Optimal use of radar data in severe storm nowcasting
1 – 5 March 2027	<b>The legendary STANDARD</b> every forecaster should attend at least once: Course on Forecasting Severe Convection
15 – 19 March 2027	Course – spring edition: Aviation Forecasting of Severe Convection
10 – 14 May 2027 (tentative dates)	EUMETSAT-ESSL Forecaster Training Testbed with focus on MTG – week 1
31 May – 4 June 2027 (tentative dates)	EUMETSAT-ESSL Forecaster Training Testbed with focus on MTG – week 2
7 – 11 June 2027	ESSL Testbed 2027 – regular week (focus on radar and NWP)

7 – 11 June 2027	ESSL testbed with focus on radar, nowcasting products and NWP – week 1
21 – 25 June 2027	ESSL Testbed with focus on radar, nowcasting products and NWP – week 2
28 June – 2 July 2027	ESSL Testbed – expert week This event is by invitation only.
13 – 17 September 2027 (tentative dates)	EUMETSAT-ESSL Forecaster Training Testbed with focus on MTG – week 3
18 – 22 October 2027	European Conference on Severe Storms – ECSS2027 in Genova, Italy
22 – 26 November 2027	Course – autumn edition: Aviation Forecasting of Severe Convection

You can find details about all events and registration at

<https://www.events.essl.org/>.

Unsure which course to attend? [Try our online quiz!](#)

For further information about registration, please contact us via email at [events@essl.org](mailto:events@essl.org).

Or contact us for [tailored training or forecaster training on the job](#).



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